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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, the George Washington Foundation, the Fredericksburg Area Museum, and the Fredericksburg community for their support and role in this salvage project. We would also like to acknowledge our anonymous reviewers.

Trial by Fire: The Marshall-Bell Kiln Site in Fredericksburg, Virginia

Heidi E. Krofft and Paul M. Nasca

In 2012 and 2013 community members and local professional archaeologists, led by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, worked together to salvage a stoneware waster dump in Fredericksburg, Virginia. More than 17,000 artifacts were recovered representing two successive potters, Hugh R. Marshall and Francis H. Bell. This article brings together archaeological and documentary evidence to discuss this short-lived pottery operation of the early 1830s. Considered are the physical attributes of the vessel forms and decorations, and the broader aspects of how this pottery operated within the local community and regional markets.

En 2012 et 2013, des membres de la communauté et des archéologues professionnels locaux, dirigés par Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, ont travaillé ensemble pour fouiller un dépotoir de grès à Fredericksburg, en Virginie. Plus de 17 000 artefacts ont été récupérés, représentant le travail de deux potiers successifs, Hugh R. Marshall et Francis H. Bell. Cet article rassemble des preuves archéologiques et documentaires pour discuter de cet atelier de poterie, en opération pour une courte durée au début des années 1830. Les attributs physiques des formes et des décorations des récipients sont pris en compte, ainsi que les aspects plus larges du fonctionnement de cette poterie au sein de la communauté locale et des marchés régionaux.

Introduction

Significant scholarship has been devoted to the study of well-established 19th-century urban stoneware potteries of the Mid-Atlantic in such cities as Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond (Jenkins 2019; Kille 2005; Magid 2012, 2013; Russ et al. 2013; Zipp 2004). Small-scale and short-term production in cities and towns of the region, however, has often been overlooked. Archaeological excavation and documentary research has brought one such pottery to light: the Marshall-Bell kiln (Site 44SP0646) in Fredericksburg, Virginia (FIG. 1). More than 17,000 stoneware artifacts, representing two potters who operated the kiln in succession during the early 1830s, were recovered during salvage excavations of the waster dump at the site. This article examines the archaeological and documentary evidence of stoneware production in Fredericksburg, how this production fit within the context of the local business community, and highlights how brief these operations were despite the potters' best efforts.

Archaeological Excavations

In the fall of 2012, the first evidence of stoneware production in Fredericksburg came to light. While a backhoe operator was testing soil at the site of the current Amelia Square townhouses, a city construction inspector, who is also an amateur archaeologist, identified several stoneware fragments and kiln furniture. Word quickly spread through the archaeology and local communities, putting the wheels in motion for an archaeological salvage project at the site. A researcher at the local library delved into the historical newspapers and found a reference in the *Virginia Herald* (1832), that, in fact, a stoneware pottery did exist on the site. Simultaneously, Dovetail Cultural Resource Group and the City of Fredericksburg worked to gain permission from the developer to conduct an archaeological salvage project before construction efforts continued.

Dovetail had previously conducted archaeological testing on the parcel in 2007 and 2008, focusing on the area east of the then extant

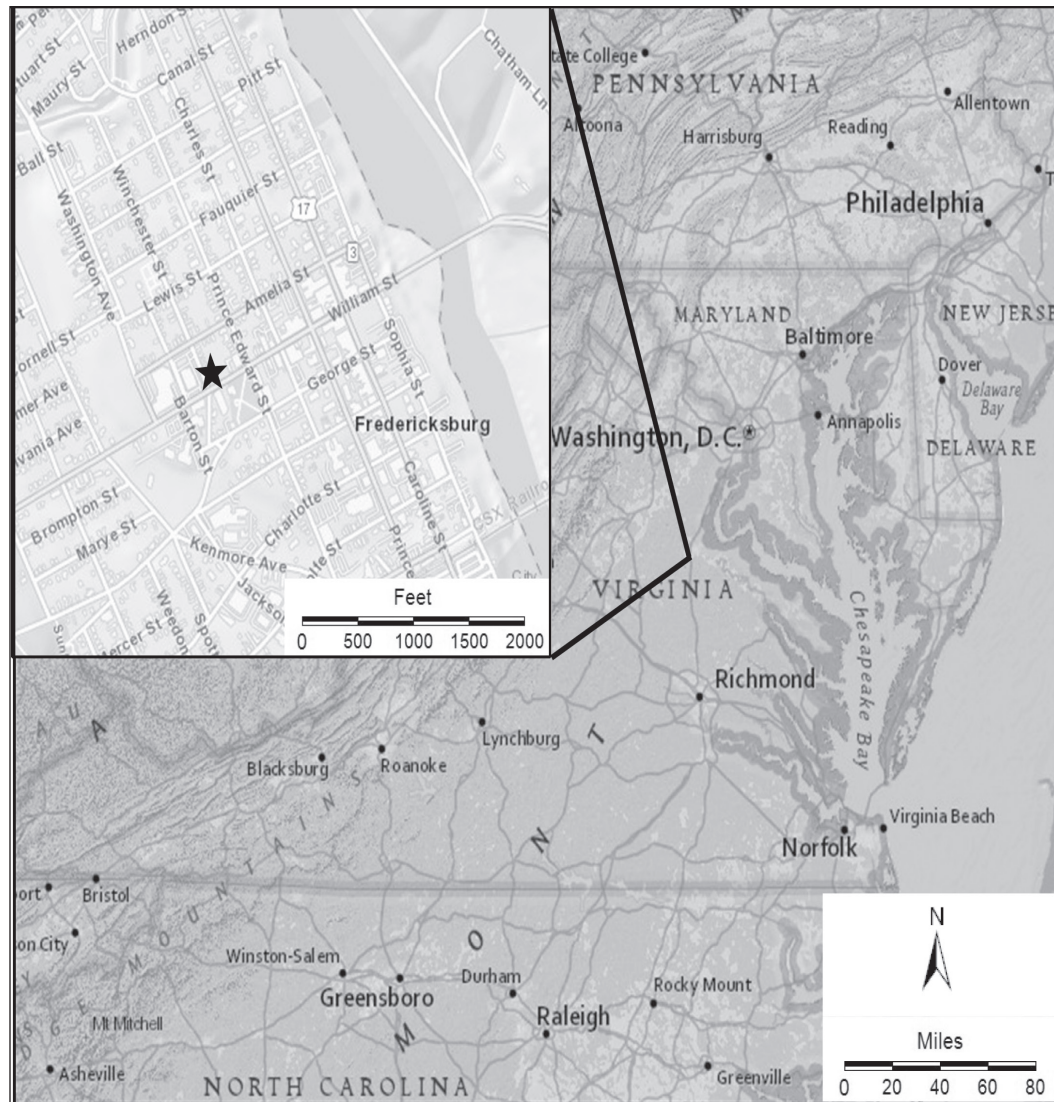


Figure 1. Location of the Marshall-Bell Kiln site (denoted by the star) at the corner of William and Winchester streets in Fredericksburg, Virginia. (Inset and base map: VCRIS [2019a, 2019b]; modifications by Heidi E. Krofft, 2020.)

Fredericksburg Hardware Store (44SP0585). No evidence of the pottery was located at that time (Barile et al. 2007). The hardware store was ultimately demolished in the fall of 2011 to make way for the construction of the new townhouses. In response to the discovery of stoneware waster fragments, archaeologists returned to the site in October of 2012, targeting the areas that had previously been covered by the hardware store. This salvage effort included the excavation of five backhoe

trenches oriented east–west and spaced at 25 ft. intervals. Two additional trenches were excavated perpendicular to these in the immediate area in which the stoneware fragments had been found (FIG. 2). This effort revealed numerous features, which were then mapped and sampled. Unfortunately, none dated to the time when stoneware was produced on the site (Krofft et al. 2014: 5–6).

Archaeologists again returned to the site in February 2013 during the construction of the



Figure 2. Site map showing location of backhoe trenches. The triangle denotes the location of the waster pile discovered in 2013. (Map: Dovetail Cultural Resource Group[2013]; modifications by Heidi E. Krofft, 2020.)

new townhouses. At that time a stoneware waster pile was identified just feet from the center backhoe trench that was excavated in 2012. It was characterized by numerous fragments of over-fired and under-fired stoneware sherds and kiln furniture (FIG. 3). The roughly circular feature measured approximately 12 × 12 ft. and was sampled with a 2 × 5 ft. test unit. A total of 1,443 ceramic artifacts were recovered from this test unit, 91% of which were identified as waster fragments and 8% as kiln furniture and kiln bricks (Krofft et al. 2014: 38–39). In addition to what was recovered from the controlled test unit, another 15,500 stoneware waster and kiln furniture fragments were recovered from unprovenienced contexts and backhoe trenches during the salvage

efforts. Due to the sheer quantity, the artifacts recovered from back-dirt piles were sorted in the field, and only those with diagnostic attributes, such as base and rim fragments, decorated or undecorated sherds, and various types of kiln furniture, were retained. In the lab, the unprovenienced artifacts were further counted and sorted based on these attributes (Krofft et al. 2014: 7).

Integral to this project was a group of community volunteers who worked closely with the professional archaeologists. Their efforts included sifting soils, recovering artifacts, and assisting with sorting in the field. In the lab, volunteers helped to wash, label, and sort the thousands of artifacts. Overall, this combined effort of volunteers and professionals was suc-

successful in engaging the public in the discovery of the community's history.

Historical Narrative

By the time the pottery at the Marshall-Bell kiln site was founded in the 1830s, Fredericksburg was a well-established Virginia Tidewater town. Advantageously situated on the Rappahannock River and incorporated in 1728, the city covered 50 ac. The public wharf and numerous warehouses provided opportunities for new and growing businesses, and the river provided a connection to other Chesapeake ports and beyond (Felder 1982: 33). Over the next 20 years Fredericksburg's population increased, and in 1759 the city boundaries expanded to include the eastern two-thirds of the Amelia Square townhouses lot. By the first half of the 19th century, the western third of the lot still lay outside the city limits, but within an area known as "Liberty Town," a well-established free African American community. The townhouses lot was occupied as early as 1819 and was subdivided and sold several times over the next 10 years. The subdivided parcel that would contain the future pottery works measured 25 ft. along Commerce (William) Street and 150 ft. along Winchester Street (FIG. 1). In 1826, this parcel sold for \$1,000 and included a dwelling (Fredericksburg Deed Book 1826).

The creation of the new United States spurred domestic economic growth; however, it was not until the years surrounding the War of 1812 that American industry truly took root. In the first quarter of the 19th century, Fredericksburg witnessed a dramatic increase in the shipping and milling industries, and businesses in the port town prospered. It is within this period of industrial expansion that stoneware production began in Fredericksburg.

Hugh Robbins Marshall was the first potter to establish a kiln in Fredericksburg. He began his potting career in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1810. At the age of 15, Marshall signed on as an apprentice to journeyman potter Thomas Morgan (Kille 2005: 103). Typically, a boy like Marshall would serve his



Figure 3. Stoneware waster fragments identified in the spring of 2013. (Photo by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, 2013.)

apprenticeship until he was 21 years old. In exchange for his work, he would receive the necessities of clothing and lodging, and a basic education, i.e., how to read and write. Upon fulfilling the apprenticeship, he would have mastered the skills of throwing and mixing clay, glazing pottery, and stacking and firing kilns, as well as how to run a shop (Greer 2005: 37). With this expertise, the young potter was able to work within an established manufactory or strike out on his own.

A stoneware jar, inscribed on the bottom: H R Marshall / Maker / Baltimore / 1822, indicates that Marshall worked in Baltimore, possibly at his own shop, until at least 1822 (Kille 2005: 98). An 1829 chancery court case further places Marshall in Baltimore where he is listed with potter Elisha Parr and others in a mortgage foreclosure (Baltimore County Court 1829). Perhaps this financial trouble was the catalyst for Marshall's move to Fredericksburg in 1830 at the age of 35.

In February of 1831, a notice in the *Virginia Herald* (1831a) announced the Fredericksburg marriage of Mr. Hugh R. Marshall to Miss Ann

Maria Crissey of Newburg, New York. The following month, Marshall placed ads in both the *Virginia Herald* (1831b) and the *Political Arena* (1831a) advertising that he had established a stoneware and earthenware manufactory at the head of Commerce (William) Street in Fredericksburg (FIG. 4). This location was advantageous, as it was on the town's main thoroughfare; it lay just outside the city limits, however. The reason for this was likely Marshall's compliance with a recent 1829 nuisance ordinance that prohibited the firing of any kiln within the city limits (Fredericksburg Common Council 2014: 63).

By the end of April 1831, only two months after Marshall had begun production, he sold the property and numerous personal items to storekeeper Samuel Runyon for \$1,130. The indenture identifies "a house and lot now occupied by the said Hugh R. Marshall" and "occupied as a Pottery" (Spotsylvania County Deed Book 1831). Runyon sold the property within a month to William H. Crissey (although not confirmed, possibly a relative of Marshall's wife, Ann Crissey) (Fredericksburg Deed Book 1831). In May 1831, Crissey placed an ad in the *Virginia Herald* (1831c) announcing he had opened a new dry-goods and grocery business along Commerce Street, closer to the center of town. The advertisement further mentions that he had commenced the operations of the pottery business at the head of Commerce Street. It is possible that Marshall continued on as the potter, but with Crissey now owning the business. It is not known when Marshall finally departed Fredericksburg, as there are no further records of him in town or elsewhere. In the 1850s, his wife, however, is listed in the U.S. and New York state census

records in Cornwall, New York, living with her mother, Pamela Crissey (Census of the State of New York 1855; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1850, 1860). The fact that Marshall is absent from these records implies that he was already deceased by 1850.

Although no additional deeds or lease agreements have been identified for the property, advertisements in the *Virginia Herald* provide the evidence that the stoneware pottery continued in business, but was now operated by potter Francis H. Bell. In March of 1832, Bell placed a notice stating that he "recently recommenced the Pottery Business, at the head of Commerce Street" (FIG. 5) (*Virginia Herald* 1832: 3). Bell, originally from Cornwall, New York, was the nephew of David Clark, a well-established potter in that town during the first quarter of the 19th century (Faber 1999). Makers' marks on early 19th-century stoneware from Cornwall and Kingston, New York, provide evidence that partnerships existed between Bell and his two older brothers, Moses Clark Bell and Nathan Clark Bell, both of whom were potters (Faber 1999). Similar to Hugh R. Marshall's brief tenure, Francis H. Bell's operation of the Fredericksburg pottery did not last long. Advertisements for Bell's pottery appear in newspapers in March of 1832 only. By 1835, the parcel and the property next to it were sold and became the site of the Crump & Jones Iron Foundry (Krofft et al. 2014: 15). The examination of the documentary record provided the historical context with which to place the Marshall-Bell Kiln site within the Fredericksburg community and demonstrates the ephemeral nature of the pottery, from its origins in 1831 to its demise prior to 1835.

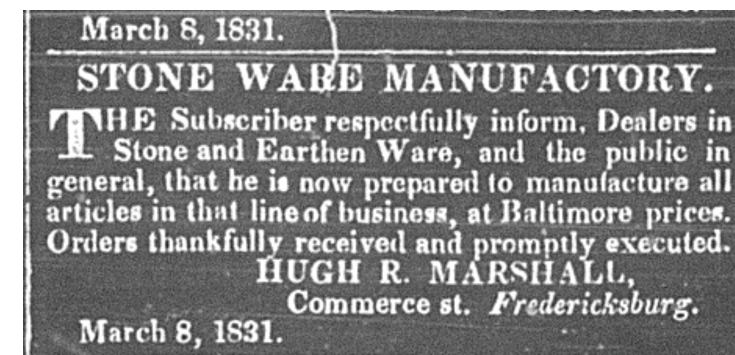


Figure 4. Advertisement for Hugh R. Marshall's "Stone Ware Manufactory." (*Political Arena* 1831a: 3)

THE Subscribers inform the public generally, that they have recently recommenced the

POTTERY BUSINESS,

At the head of Commerce Street, and opposite Mr. Geo. Crawford, grocer—where they now have on hand a beautiful assortment of good STONE WARE, comprising almost every article in that line of business—Having obtained from Baltimore, a large Stock of the best Materials, feel no doubt of being able to compete, even with Factories in that City, and at the same time to save to our customers risque and freight. We therefore hope to share, in a good degree, in the public's patronage. All orders shall be filled with dispatch, and carefully packed. The active partner, Mr. Francis H. Bell, will be found at our Factory generally—and in case of absence, a call upon Mrs. Mary Ann Gibbs, at her private residence near the Factory, will oblige each of them.

**FRANCIS H. BELL,
MARY ANN GIBBS.**

Fred'g, March 28, 1832. eo3m

Figure 5. Advertisement for Francis H. Bell's "Pottery Business." (*Virginia Herald* 1832: 3.)

Artifactual Evidence of Stoneware Production

Collectively, the information gleaned from the documentary record and the waster-pile artifact assemblage confirms that a stoneware kiln was located on the site, and wares were produced by Marshall and Bell. The large assemblage of artifacts provides tangible evidence of the vessel forms these potters produced and the decorative techniques they employed.

The recovery of bricks and kiln furniture provided evidence that the kiln structure used to fire the stoneware was located in the vicinity of the lot; likely along Winchester Street—an area later impacted by the Fredericksburg Hardware Store building. Unfortunately, the kiln itself was not identified archaeologically during the salvage excavations. A total of 50 brickbats were recovered that are interpreted as being associated with the kiln. Most of these show evidence of intense heat, such as blackening and salt-

glazed surfaces, indicating they were part of the kiln's interior. As the stoneware was stacked inside the kiln for firing, kiln furniture was used to support and stabilize the vessels. Over 2,600 pieces, including rectangular bars, various separators, and jug stackers, were recovered from the site (Hornsby Heindl 2013). The kiln furniture was made of the same clay as the vessels and was dipped in a coarse sand to prevent it from permanently adhering to the stoneware vessels during the intense heat of firing. Many of the pieces, primarily the various separators, were custom made during stacking process and bear the fingerprints of the kiln worker (FIG. 6).

The stoneware waster sherds recovered through the salvage efforts total more than 14,000 artifacts. These are from vessels that did not survive the firing or unstacking process for reasons such as over firing, slumping, adherence to another vessel, or breaking while the kiln was unloaded. The wasters represent numerous vessel forms, including bottles, butter churns, cake crocks, flasks, jars, jugs, milk pans, pitchers, and water coolers (FIGS. 7 and 8). These forms served many functions, including the storage and preparation of food, and the storage of liquids and dry goods. While the vessels could be utilized in many ways, their primary function was tied to their form. Those vessels with narrow mouths, such as jugs, bottles, and flasks, were used to store liquids. Jars and pots with wider mouths were most often used to preserve and store foods or dry goods. One of the more unusual forms recovered was a water cooler, a straight-sided jar with a bunghole at its bottom to accept a spigot for dispensing water or other liquids.

Of the total number of fragments recovered, 36 sherds bear impressed or incised numbers. These numbers represent capacity marks, which indicated the volume or size of a vessel. The marks recovered are 1, 1½, 2, 3, and 4. Since no known complete vessel survives, it is assumed that the capacity marks represent gallon sizes. They are present on several different vessel forms, mainly jugs, but also on straight-sided jars and milk pans, indicating that each form was produced in more than one size. The majority of the capacity marks are hand incised. These handwritten numbers show variation in the style of the script, most notably for the numbers 2 and 3

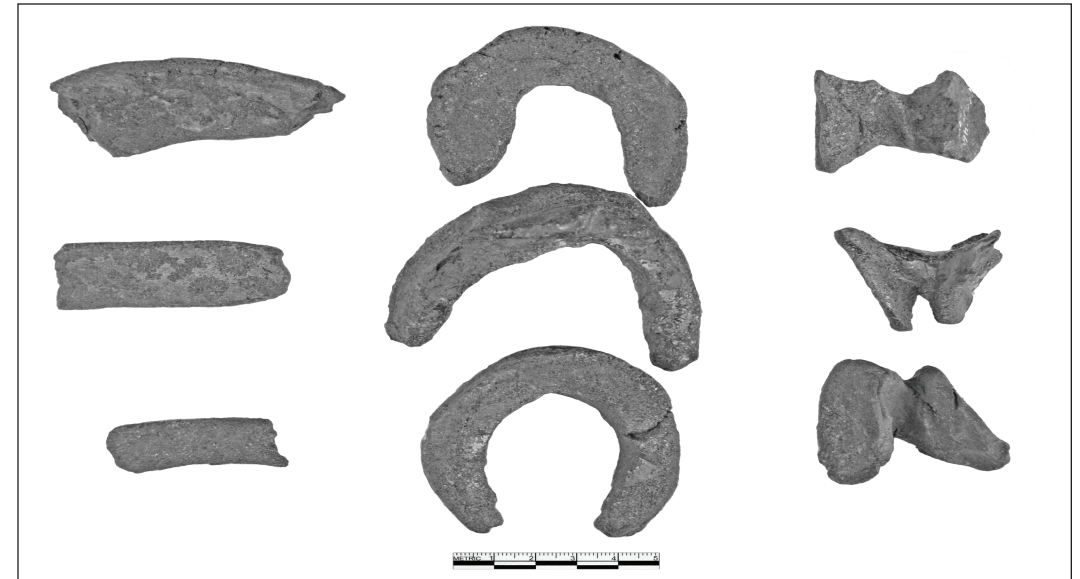


Figure 6. Kiln furniture recovered from the Marshall-Bell Kiln site. Left to right: Bars, crescent separators, and pool separators. (Photo by Kerry González, 2020.)

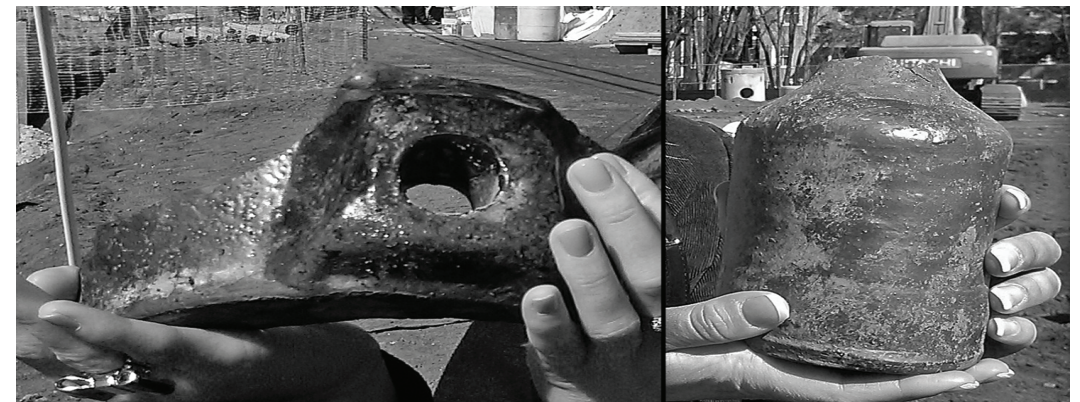


Figure 7. Waster fragments recovered in the field, representing two vessel types: a water cooler (left) and a bottle (right). (Photo by Heidi E. Krofft, 2013.)

(FIG. 9). This variation is interpreted as the hands of the two different potters at work, Hugh R. Marshall and Francis H. Bell. Another type of mark observed on the stoneware fragments is a maker's mark for Hugh R. Marshall. Unlike the handwritten script used for capacity marks, this mark is impressed using printer's type and reads: "H. R. MARSHALL, / Fred'g, V[a.]" (FIG. 10). No specific mark for Francis H. Bell was recovered.

From the assemblage of stoneware waster sherds recovered at the site, 27% ($n=3,934$)

were decorated with brushed-on cobalt. This decorative technique was used to embellish several different types of vessel forms, including jars, jugs, milk pans, pitchers, and watercoolers. Despite the number of fragments found, a complete decorative motif was not identified. The surviving fragmented motifs include wavy lines, leafy floral elements, and simple highlights on lug and strap handles (FIG. 11). The bottles and the flasks were the only vessel forms that did not have evidence of cobalt decoration. However, these and other

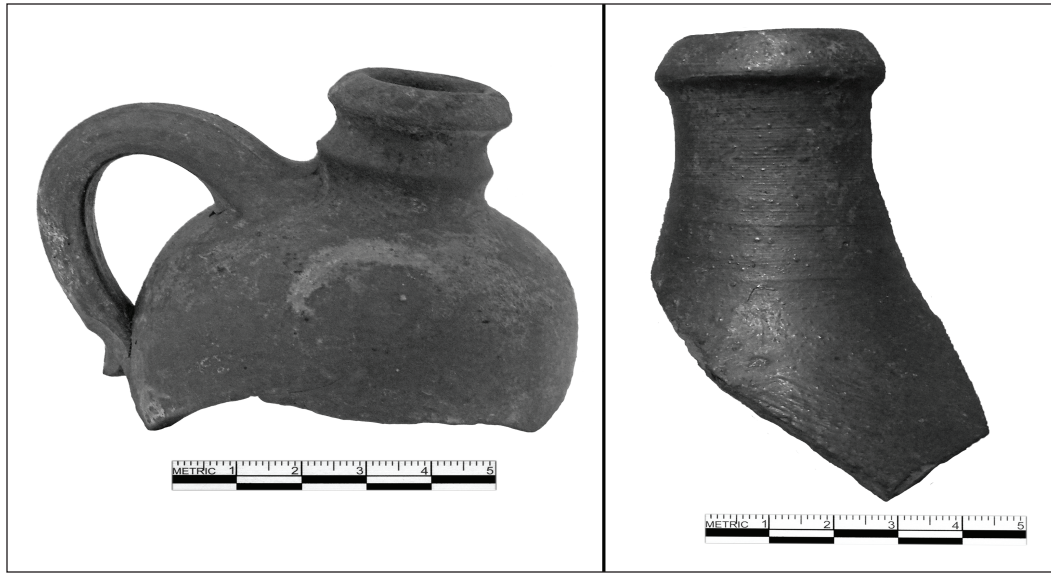


Figure 8. Vessel forms recovered include: jug (*left*) and bottle (*right*). (Photo by Kerry González, 2020.)

vessels do exhibit a dark brown clay wash on both the exterior and interior of the vessel, similar to an Albany slip. The physical features of the stoneware waster fragments that were recovered at the Marshall-Bell Kiln Site provide evidence of the vessels the potters made and their decorative techniques.

Nineteenth-Century Stoneware Production in Fredericksburg

Domestic stoneware production in America dates to as early as the 1720s, made by potters such as William Rogers in Virginia and Anthony Duché in Philadelphia (Liebeknecht 2009: 244–247). Several other potters followed during the 18th century, but pro-

duction was slow, given the easy importation of ceramics from Europe. The embargoes and blockades of goods into North America before and during the War of 1812 created an environment for American stoneware production to flourish (Myers 1980: 3–14). During the first half of the 19th century, Mid-Atlantic potteries in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond vied for new markets in cities and towns, including those without established stoneware production. For example, in the 1820s, Baltimore potters William H. Morgan and Thomas Amoss placed advertisements in Fredericksburg and Richmond newspapers documenting their reach into regional markets through their ability to ship goods outside Baltimore (Kille 2005: 119).

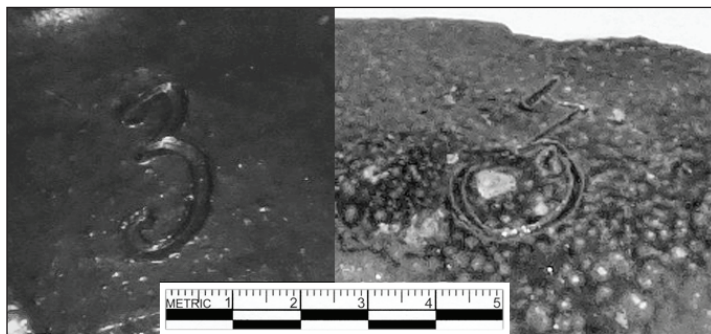


Figure 9. Variations of the number “3” in incised capacity marks. (Photo by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, 2014.)



Figure 10. The impressed maker's mark of Hugh R. Marshall. (Photo by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, 2013.)

Hugh R. Marshall's decision to strike off on his own and relocate to Fredericksburg from established potteries in Baltimore was a risky one, but not unique. Other potters from Baltimore also found it advantageous to pursue opportunities in other regions. Thomas Amoss operated a stoneware pottery outside Richmond in the 1810s and 20s, and Henry Remmey, Jr., relocated to Philadelphia by the 1830s (Kille 2009: 150–151; Zipp 2004). Likewise, Fredericksburg's second potter, Francis H. Bell, relocated from Cornwall, New York. The Hudson Valley region produced many potters like Bell who relocated to Southern states, such as Maryland and Virginia (Hunter and Goodman 2005; Jenkins 2019; Rice 2017). By establishing a stoneware pottery in Fredericksburg, both Marshall and Bell provided a locally produced option for residents and created competition for established potters already exporting their goods into the local area.

Vital for a successful pottery business was access to natural resources, including wood to fire the kiln and, most essential, high-quality clay. Stoneware potteries in cities such as Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond bene-

fited from their close proximity to deposits of clays that were suitable to withstand the extreme temperatures needed to vitrify into stoneware (Kille 2009: 156; Wilder 2007). When Marshall began producing stoneware in Fredericksburg, he used clay from Stafford County, approximately 2 mi. to the north, as stated in a newspaper notice from March 1831 (FIG. 12) (*Political Arena* 1831c). The author announces the establishment of the new stoneware operation in town and boasts of the economic boon of developing the clay “resources of the country” and keeping “at home” the “[t]housands of dollars” annually “sent to the north for articles of indispensable utility” (*Political Arena* 1831c: 2).

By the time Bell took over the kiln, he was assuring the public that he was using the finest clay from Baltimore (*Virginia Herald* 1832). Why Bell chose not to use the same local clay that Marshall did is uncertain. Perhaps this claim was a marketing ploy to encourage sales by assuring customers that his wares were equal to those made in Baltimore. However, it is most likely that the clay from Stafford County was inferior for stoneware production. The newspaper advertisements that both Marshall and Bell placed provide a glimpse into how they intended their business to fit into the Fredericksburg community. Both potters sought to serve “dealers in stone and earthen ware” with bulk orders as well as



Figure 11. Example of floral brushed cobalt motif on rim sherd. (Photo by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, 2014.)

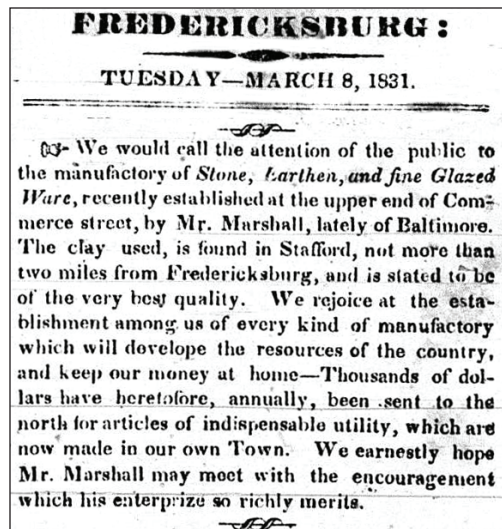


Figure 12. Notice discussing the benefits of the new pottery operated by Hugh R. Marshall. (*Political Arena* 1831c: 2.)

serving the “public in general” (*Political Arena* 1831a: 3; *Virginia Herald* 1831a: 3, 1832: 3). Although there are no known wholesale pricing schedules for either potter, this was a common practice within the stoneware industry (Kille 2009: 115). However, archaeological evidence demonstrates the potters were indeed able to produce and sell bulk lots to local merchants and businesses. Three waster fragments bore the handwritten inscription: Newby (FIG. 13). James Newby owned a coffee-, oyster-, and porter- house on Caroline Street in Fredericksburg. In May 1831 he advertised the sale of fresh and pickled oysters, the latter being “put up in ½ gallon and ¼ quart pots, corked and sealed, prepared expressly for Family use” (*Political Arena* 1831b: 3). The timing of Newby’s advertisement and the inscribed stoneware fragments recovered archaeologically from the site provide evidence that the pots Newby was using were made by Marshall. Further, this demonstrates that Marshall was successful at firing his kiln and producing wares to be consumed by the local community, despite his brief period of operation.

Conclusion

A potter’s ability to survive in the business depended on several factors, including opera-

tional costs, product marketability, and local competition (Wilder 2007: 57). It is unclear why neither Marshall nor Bell was able to sustain a stoneware business in Fredericksburg despite the many apparent advantages, such as a viable transportation network, no local competition, and an established community to purchase their wares.

Hugh R. Marshall was in business for just a few months in the spring of 1831. His significant investment in the construction of a kiln and procurement of local clay for his wares may have exhausted his financial resources before he saw a return on his investment. The archaeological materials recovered, however, provide evidence that he was successful in firing his kiln. Further, the recovery of fragments marked “Newby” demonstrates that Marshall was able to sell his wares to local businesses, such as James Newby’s Coffee House. This would have provided some initial income for Marshall’s new pottery, but ultimately his business venture in Fredericksburg failed.

The fact that Francis H. Bell was able to survive slightly longer, from the spring of 1832 until sometime prior to 1835, suggests that there was a market for his stoneware goods



Figure 13. Jar fragments with the incised inscription “Newby”, intended for use at Newby’s Coffee House. (Photo by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group, 2014.)

within Fredericksburg and the surrounding region. However, this market was not enough to sustain his long-term success. Added to this may have been additional costs accrued by Bell for importing clay from the Baltimore area. Further, he may not have been able to compete with already-established pottery operations in Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond, and the well-known quality of products they produced.

There are no fragments or vessels produced by Marshall and Bell during their time in Fredericksburg that are known to exist in museums or in the hands of private collectors. It is only through the archaeological evidence salvaged from the site and research into Fredericksburg’s documentary record that the brief tenure of these long-forgotten potters has come to light. The experience of these two potters embodies the American spirit of entrepreneurship and delves into the challenges they faced, truly a trial by fire. The business ventures undertaken by Hugh R. Marshall and Francis H. Bell may have been in vain, but this archaeological project brought together community members and professional archaeologists to reveal a chapter of Fredericksburg’s history before it was lost to modern development.

Acknowledgments

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